



FIRST THINGS FIRST

The right system for bright futures

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The Importance of Story Time

By Lynn Dean

“Once upon a time there was a princess named Amy. She lived at the beach near Bob...” I listened as my youngest carefully “read” a story to her baby doll. Although the words did not match the text, I knew that I had instilled a great love of reading in my child. Indeed, she was emulating one of our favorite activities—story time.

A love for reading and books is one of the most precious gifts parents can give their children. While knowing how to read is essential for day-to-day survival, loving to read opens new worlds for children. By reading, children can visit people in different lands, fight fire-breathing dragons to save a royal princess, or learn how to build the perfect windmill. The possibilities are endless. Even so, fostering a love of reading requires a bit of work on our part as parents.

Read, Read, Read

Story time plays an important role in introducing children to the magic of books. Although it is never too late to start, we should begin reading books to our children when they are very small, even before they can walk and talk. As babies, children enjoy books with bright pictures and simple text. Board books that babies can manipulate themselves (and chew on) are good choices, too. Also good are books that are lyrical, such as Dr. Seuss books and nursery rhymes. While babies cannot understand the intricacies of the language, they do enjoy the rhythm of words. This early introduction to reading develops a child’s love of books and fosters a close, loving relationship between parent and child.

As children grow older, our choices of books should reflect a child’s interests. My two-year-old nephew, for example, adores trains and enjoys listening to adults read books about “choo choos.” Older children also like to be involved in the story being read. Asking questions such as: “Where is the squirrel hiding?”; “Show me the orange ball.” and “What do you think Tommy will do next?” encourage interaction.

Here’s a Book, There’s a Book

Experts agree that the prevalence of books in the home fosters a desire to read in children. The more books and other reading materials that are available, the more children will value reading. As a result,

include books, newspapers, magazines, books on tape and other reading materials in the home. When creating a library, remember that books don't have to be new to be entertaining. Hand-me-downs from friends and books purchased at thrift stores and garages sales work just as well as new books.

Every Where's a Book Nook

When you are encouraging children to read, remember to provide a comfortable place for reading. All that is required is a cuddly spot furnished with pillows, blankets, good lighting, and a variety of reading materials. For storage, I have found that large plastic dishpans make excellent "book buckets." They hold books of all sizes and are portable from one reading spot to another.

The Storehouse of Knowledge

No matter how hard we try, we can't stock all of the books our children need or will want to read in a home library, although technological advances may cause me to rethink this statement in the next decade. For now, libraries are the storehouse of knowledge. There, books on every subject can be caressed and read. Want to know the difference between a reptile and an amphibian? The answer is in the library. In addition to loaning books, many libraries also set aside times for storytelling. Children enjoy seeing a book brought to life with puppets and other fun props.

Drop Everything and Read

Nothing is as important as fostering children's interest in reading. That is why Drop Everything and Read (DEAR) time is important for both parents and children. DEAR time serves not only as a relaxation activity, but it also gives families who are "too busy to read" a time to refocus and get lost in a tale or two. Remember, the more our children see us read, the more they will want to read, too.

If you would like more information about early childhood programs in your community or would like information about First Things First, please feel free to contact Rochelle Lacapa at (928) 532-5041 or via email at rlacapa@azftf.gov.